Chapter Six

Finally— Creating a Real Plan!

FOCUS

- Who needs a watershed plan?
- Elements of a watershed plan
- What should we do after we write the plan?

Your watershed group has been meeting for some time by now, and you are wondering when, if ever, this Guide is going to tell you how to put together a watershed plan!

The group is ready to document the plan on paper when

- the members have learned to work together with respect and trust, all critical interests are represented, and they are able to make and support decisions;
- concerns have been voiced, a vision has been developed, and members have drawn up problem statements and measurable goals;
- the watershed has been inventoried and all the information is available to make sound decisions;
- the members have begun to sort through alternatives for addressing problems and meeting goals, and have discussed how they will measure their progress.

Who needs a watershed plan?

Some groups reach this point, but do not see a need for documenting their intentions in a written plan. They may feel that they know well enough what they are doing and do not need a written plan. They may view writing a watershed plan as a major task that will sap their resources, or they may simply not know where to start. If the project is very small and short-term, and if the group does not need outside resources to complete tasks, then perhaps a written plan is not needed. However, here are some important reasons for developing a written watershed plan:

- **To have a long-term, positive effect on water quality or other natural resources.** A written plan documents what the group knows about the watershed, records priorities and ideas, persons responsible for implementation, and provides a process for monitoring and evaluation. As new people join the group and partnership roles change, the written plan is a road map of direction and continuity.

- **To let the community know about the project.** A plan provides the group with a way of saying to the community, "This is who we are, why we are working together, what we have accomplished, and where we are going."
- **To obtain funding and support from local government, state & federal sources, or industry.** A plan provides the group with a marketing tool. It can be used to demonstrate that they are organized, committed, working well together, and have a partnership that represents many interests in the watershed. The plan also makes it easier and faster to prepare funding proposals and grant applications.
- **To track progress and celebrate success.** By establishing a monitoring and evaluation process, a plan makes it easier to measure progress toward the goals the group has established. By periodically reviewing the plan, the group can document their success and determine whether they have focused their resources effectively.
- **To expand and become more effective.** People want to know what they can do to improve the area where they live, and they want to be part of a success story. By clearly documenting problems and opportunities, and by proposing appropriate and practical solutions, a plan invites others in the community to participate in watershed projects. As the partnership grows, it becomes easier to implement the plan.

Remember, a plan is a road map, not the Encyclopedia Britannica

Whether you refer to your plan as an action plan, guide, blueprint, watershed user's manual, or whatever, you are essentially creating a road map telling how the group will get from here to there. A plan answers these four questions:

Where do we want to be?
Where are we now?
How are we going to get there?
How will we know when we have arrived?

You can put your plan together in any order that makes sense to you and clearly answers those questions for the reader. The size, level of detail, and technical complexity of the plan will depend on the characteristics of the watershed and what degree of change is needed to meet your goals. Be flexible: you may want to have a brief plan summary that will be used with the public, and an expanded technical plan that will lay out the necessary steps in enough detail to implement them. You may want to put your plan in a binder so additions and revisions can be made easily.

Every plan is unique to the community and to the watershed for which it is written. It is not the intention of this Guide to dictate any particular way of arranging or presenting a plan, or to stifle the creativity and enthusiasm of your group. There are, however, certain elements of a good and effective plan, and you should consider these as you put your plan together.

Elements of a watershed plan

Where do we want to go?

Vision and mission of the group
Measurable goals and targets
Executive summary of the plan

Where are we now?

Concerns of the community
Problem statements
Members of the group
History of the group
Structure of the group
Current condition of the watershed
Information gathered in the inventory

How are we going to get there?

Possible alternatives
Selected alternatives
Implementation or action plan (who, what, when, and how)
Resources (funding, manpower, and other needs)

How will we know when we've arrived?

Monitoring strategy
Indicators for goal targets
Schedule for evaluation

Essential details: Include a contact person(s) with phone number and address, a table of contents, a glossary of acronyms, sources for specific data, and maps of the watershed.

If your group has worked through the steps in the previous chapters, then a lot of the material listed above already exists, at least in your heads. ***It is especially important to 'corral' all the inventory material, records of decisions made by the group (minutes, meeting notes), and records of things the group has accomplished (tours, field trips, work sessions, et cetera.)*** It is helpful to set up a large three-ring binder with a tab for each of the elements listed above and insert material into it as the group reaches these stages of growth.

The group's decision-making body (steering committee, executive board, or other structure) can then designate a coordinator or small committee to write up the various parts of the plan, not necessarily all at once. When all of the elements have been completed, the plan is also complete.

A review period for the draft plan is critical. Send copies ***very clearly marked DRAFT*** to anyone who has had input to the plan, people whose support you will want later, and those who may have had misgivings about portions of the plan. Not only will you receive useful feedback, but you may also save yourself from having to eat crow at a later date.

If you want to have the plan printed rather than photocopied, see whether the county government, another agency, or your local school system will offer an inexpensive way to get copies printed. Fancy packaging is not as important as content, but the plan should appear neat and professional so it will be taken seriously.

We wrote it; now what do we do with it?

Once the plan is in some sort of coherent state and has been tidied up for public presentation, here are some of the things the group could do with it:

- **Each member needs a copy** for reference.
- **Send a copy to all the movers and shakers in your watershed:** county government officials, especially the planning commission, county commissioners, health department, water utilities, and drainage board; people in agencies who have the authority to delegate resources to your cause, interest groups, possible future sources of support, opponents, et cetera. *An executive summary is handy for reducing copy costs and providing a readable document; those who want more detail can request the technical plan.* A cover letter, or better yet a personal contact, should be included.
- **Prepare funding requests,** grant applications, coordinator job descriptions, et cetera from the material in the plan.
- **Put copies in local libraries,** schools, or wherever the plan may get some attention.
- **Hold a public meeting** to introduce the plan to the community and encourage participation in projects. Hopefully all interests in the community have been represented in the plan development; otherwise, you may suddenly face a lot of changes!
- **Put your plan on the Web** either through your own website, or by piggybacking on the website of a supporter such as the county government, conservation district, et cetera. This is an inexpensive way to get a lot of exposure. It also makes it easy to amend or add to the plan.
- **Implement the plan** and work toward your goals! The whole point is to do work in the watershed, not to produce a stack of paper.
- **Review your plan regularly,** and use it to develop specific action plans for projects. Don't hesitate to revise or update it as needed. Don't let it sit on a shelf!

What follows are two checklists used by some groups or agencies to develop plans or to review plans for funding. Remember that your plan needs to fit your watershed, so not all parts of either checklist may be applicable.

[Example I]

Checklist for Watershed Management Plans

(for plans developed with citizen involvement at the local level, addressing water quality concerns)

Watershed _____ Plan Date _____

Note: This checklist provides guidance to groups preparing watershed plans. It is not intended to be a template for any particular plan, and it is not a list of requirements. The checklist shows items that should be considered when preparing a plan; each plan is unique and must reflect the community and the watershed for which it is prepared.

	Component	✔	Comments
1. Introduction	Are mission/vision/goals/objectives clearly stated?	❑	
	Are problems and concerns in the watershed clearly identified, and sources of those problems clearly identified and described?	❑	
	Explain how and why the watershed group got together.	❑	
	Define group structure, who is in the group, and how the group operates.	❑	
	Why was a watershed plan developed?	❑	
	How did the public participate in the plan? (Include letters or other documentation for public participation in an appendix.)	❑	
	Is the planning boundary defined & shown on a map? Is there an inset to show where this watershed is in the state?	❑	
2. Determine objectives	Clearly state how objectives/goals were developed. Who was involved in determining goals and what was the process?	❑	
	Are objectives/goals realistic and appropriate?	❑	

3. Inventory resources	Explain how information was gathered, where the information came from, and how watershed resources were inventoried.	❑
	Is the information shown clearly with narratives, maps, tables, et cetera, that are easy to understand? Are "before," or benchmark conditions described?	❑
4. Analyze	Explain how the information was used to develop alternative solutions to problems in the watershed.	❑
	Explain how concerns in the watershed are prioritized.	❑
5. Formulate & evaluate	Explain what alternatives the group looked at for solving problems in the watershed.	❑
	Discuss ecological, social, economic, and other considerations for each alternative or group of alternatives.	❑
	Explain the effect of each alternative: cost, value to the environment, acceptability/ appropriateness in this watershed, et cetera.	❑
6. Make decisions	What decisions did the group make about addressing problems in the watershed? What was the decision-making process? Who was involved? Why were certain alternatives accepted or rejected?	❑
	What will the group do to carry out the plan? Set targets (example: "Reduce sediment delivery by 25% in 10 years"). Use indicators (water quality standards, biological indexes, et cetera) to show what will be measured to determine success.	❑
	Document current conditions (see #3) in order to set achievable targets.	❑
7. Implementing the plan	Develop an action plan stating what will be done, when it will happen and how long it will take, and who will be responsible for each action.	❑
	What resources are needed (manpower, money, et cetera)? Describe any funding, grants, sponsorship, or programs that will help meet goals.	❑
	Is there a partnership agreement with landowners? Are there any incentives?	❑
	How will the work be inspected and maintained?	❑

7. (cont'd) How does this plan fit in with other conservation work going on in the watershed? ❑

8. Monitor How will progress be monitored, both in practical terms of work done and in terms of changes in water quality? Who will be responsible? ❑

Describe how the watershed plan will be reevaluated based on the monitoring information? ❑

General Recommendations

In Your Plan, Consider Including These:

- Who (person or group) prepared the plan and who sponsored it (usually on the cover or inside cover).
- Contact person and phone number or at least an address.
- Brief calendar of when things happened, and when things are going to happen. The progression of events may be confusing to some readers who were not involved in the process.
- Glossary of terms that may be unfamiliar to readers.
- Brief description of the institutions, agencies, and groups involved in the planning effort.
- How and where the plan will be distributed, and how the plan may be used (example: to obtain funding).
- Use a format (binder, folder) that allows extra pages to be added or inserted as things progress.

Absolutely Essential?

- Proofread, proofreed, prufread—and then have a few other people proffread. Even your computer spell-checker can be fooled.
- Spell out all acronyms the first time they're used in the text—you don't know who will be reading the plan.
- In the text, define any terms that are technical or specialized (examples: HEL, "T", gradient, pH, WASCOB, et cetera).

Project Design Checklist for Nonpoint Source Water Quality Projects on a Watershed Basis

Following is a checklist of ideas and tactics gleaned from The National Rural Clean Water Program Symposium held September 13-17, 1992 in Orlando, Florida, and from other sources, that are keys to efficiently and successfully implementing any new federal, state or local water quality programs or projects on a watershed basis.

We encourage program managers to develop a project checklist by integrating their ideas with the following points.

In general, projects should

- ❑ Have a clearly stated goal, supported by a realistic assessment of the problem and the feasibility of solving it.
- ❑ Stress voluntary participation through education, technical assistance and incentives, and emphasize project benefits.
- ❑ Stress target audience involvement at project initiation.
- ❑ Target areas where realistic water quality benefits can be maintained and/or obtained. It should be recognized that because of forces of nature or the natural environment, some areas may not respond to water quality treatments.
- ❑ Concentrate on one-on-one education and demonstration programs.
- ❑ Have full funding for the project committed up front.
- ❑ Include necessary cost-share funds.
- ❑ Be long-term (>10 years) in order to understand causes of nonpoint source pollution and the effects Best Management Practices (BMPs) have on water quality.
- ❑ Have a clear understanding of BMPs already in place prior to the study.
- ❑ Have adequate pre-implementation assessment and monitoring.
- ❑ Evaluate all sources of potential pollutants that might override water quality improvements produced by individual BMP practices (for example, phosphorus loading and cycling from existing lake bottom sediments, existing soil-nutrient concentrations, erosion from stream banks, point sources, and non-agricultural nonpoint sources.) If necessary, take additional measurements to demonstrate that BMPs are producing water quality improvements that will succeed in the long-term.
- ❑ Evaluate land uses in detail for each year for all land within the project, regardless of participation. (Actual water quality improvements produced by a majority of the farmers upstream can be underestimated because of impacts of a few non-participating landowners preceding the monitoring station.)
- ❑ Have a written, agreed-upon plan (protocol) and time lines.
- ❑ Have sufficient funding to accomplish scientific assessment and evaluation, which should include measurements such as long-term, continuous-flow discharge records and flow proportional sampling. (This may require anywhere from 10-50% of the budget.)
- ❑ Have a separate, independent group of recognized experts/professionals overseeing design and implementation of monitoring and analysis procedures, and evaluation of data.
- ❑ Measure participating and non-participating landowners' and other interested groups' attitudes and perception both pre- and post-project.

Local project teams should:

- ❑ Implement processes for getting people to work together. One of the best processes involves five crucial steps that should be taken in the following order:

  Step #1. At the first meeting develop a written statement of the group's beliefs that are relevant to the project.
  Step #2. Determine the wants and needs of group members that are relative to the issue and prioritize them.
  Step #3. Develop and agree on obtainable, measurable written objectives for priority wants and needs.
  Step #4. Develop a plan of implementation for the most significant objectives, including a) necessary resources of persons, finances, equipment, time and space, and b) appropriate techniques (committees, meetings, training sessions, newsletters, tours, demonstration projects, et cetera).
  Step #5. Periodically evaluate the group's performance against the plan of implementation and make adjustments to the plan or to the written beliefs, if necessary.

  Step #1 is the most crucial part of working together on any local project. It must be done first to ensure an efficient and successful project—too often people want to jump right to step #4 and ignore the first three steps.

- ❑ Recognize existing accomplishments of farmers and ranchers. Don't incriminate; instead, say "Let's build and do better."
- ❑ Develop and agree upon, at the start of the project, a written set of limitations about what the project can't do.
- ❑ Staff for adequate one-on-one educational and technical assistance with landowners who choose to change practices. Project organizers also should work closely with Extension Service and Vo-Ag instructors.
- ❑ Tailor BMPs to the local situation or objective.
- ❑ Make producers aware, up front, of both the positive and negative economic potentials of every BMP. Positive economic benefits, coupled with environmental effectiveness, are very powerful motivational forces.
- ❑ Use small watersheds (no bigger than the size of the county, and preferably smaller.)
- ❑ Be an inter-agency and inter-disciplinary effort.
- ❑ Include a local coordinating committee of no more than seven to eleven members. Landowners should compose at least one-third to one-half of the committee.
- ❑ Have core project staff designated from participating agencies.
- ❑ Have a project coordinator who is retained for the life of the project.
- ❑ Agree upon a system of regular two-way communication between the Local Coordinating Committee and the State Coordinating Committee.
- ❑ Establish, in advance, estimates of the necessary quality of data recorded to demonstrate impact of BMPs.
- ❑ Involve the secretarial staff of all participating agencies. They should meet with project leaders near the start of the project to help develop key reporting forms that will be used to document project progress and results.